

EXAMINING HOW AESTHETICS
CAN FORM AND BEND GENRES
IN THE MEDIUM OF FILM

A CREATIVE PROJECT
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FUFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF ARTS
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MUNCIE, INDIANA
MAY 2021

CHAPTER I: Introduction

Art is all around us, ever-pervasive in all sorts of aspects of life. It allows creatives to express themselves, send messages, and most importantly, tell stories. There is no denying that it is an extremely present and important force in our world, one that has been around since humans learned to draw and one that will continue to be around as long as we exist. It is an undeniable part of the human experience. So, with art and artistic creations being so prevalent and culturally important, it makes sense that we as humans aim to try to categorize different types of art in different ways. This allows people to group things together in ways that make sense and can better help their understanding of whatever form of art they are observing. Art, and its aesthetics, span many mediums, it can be anything including painting, sculpture, literature, and for this project, film.

Film is a relatively new form of art, one that has only been around as long as the invention of the camera, which in the larger arc of human history, is not that long ago. Yet, filmmaking is an art form all the same, and just like all other forms of art, people categorize it in certain ways. The term for the categorization of this medium is "genre." Now, this term can of course be applied to all sorts of other mediums of art as well, which it often is. Things such as paintings, books, and music can have genres just as films can. Merriam-Webster defines the term genre as, "a category of artistic, musical, or literary composition characterized by a particular style, form, or content." For specifically for the medium of film, defining genre can relate into an academic theory on the subject, known as genre theory. This concept states that:

Genre Theory involves classifying a film into a category that contains other films that have similar aspects. These could be similar narratives, characters, filming techniques, or other formal features. The word genre comes from the French (and originally Latin) word for 'kind' or 'class'. There are a variety of ways, reasons why, and how to define genre. Some people may group by period, country, director, or purpose. While others assign genre by story content, literature, performance, budget based, racial identity, artistic status, etc. By grouping these films together, it provides a structure by which they can be evaluated relative to each other and to the genre as a whole (2014).

One aspect of this theory is that genres are used to categorize movies in ways that will help the audience know what to expect when deciding to watch something. For example, if someone knows they don't like scary or dark subject matter, then they know to stay away from works that are listed in the horror genre. If someone wants to have a laugh and be entertained through humor, they know to go to the comedy genre. It all goes back to being a way to categorize works of art into ways that help audiences' expectations of whatever type of art they are going to be observing or consuming.

All that being said, the concept of genre is not a completely steadfast set of rules when it comes to categorization. Some films may have obvious, overarching genres that one can easily categorize them into. Other films' genres might not always be clear, or there is the possibility that they fit into several genre categories. This indicates that there are many specific and nuanced things that can go into categorizing the genre and how that categorization is approached. This is once again usually the case for most mediums of art. Many different aspects go into what might put a work into the category of a certain genre. This also means that a work, again specifically film for the purposes of this project, might have multiple genres associated with it. In fact, most films do not concretely fit into one certain genre. Even if a film for the most part sticks to the parameters that are associated with a certain genre, there can easily be elements of other genres sprinkled within it, which can lead to debate on the film's overall genre by some. Films can also have subgenres as well. To iterate this, one could examine the first *Harry Potter* film (Columbus, 2001). This film is one that would probably be labeled by most people as part of the fantasy genre, but there are also subgenres present, such as "coming-of-age" and "teenage romance." It again becomes quickly apparent that the concept of genre has the ability to be permeable and inexact. One would find it quite difficult to find a film that fits exactly into one specific genre

and does not venture at least slightly into the realm of others, even if those subgenres do not have as high of a precedence.

When a filmmaker sets out to make a movie, they should know what the overarching genre will be, or at least what they intend it to be if they want their film to appeal to audiences in certain ways. This can come down to the overall emotional response that the filmmaker wants the audience to have. Not only that, but there are also marketing considerations to take into account when considering this. A filmmaker needs to know what genre they are going for and how to market it relation to that genre if they want their genre-work to succeed. If the goal of a film is to make the audience feel drama, sadness, and loss, the overall tone of the film will probably be neither cheery nor happy. This is another instance where the marketing of the film can come into play. If the film was presented or marketed in a way that does not convey the emotional response goals of the filmmaker, then the filmmaker clearly did not have a grasp on the concept of genre for their film. As such, there are many factors that go into how the genre of a work is created as well as how it is categorized. These factors can include things such as writing, cinematography, editing, etc. If a filmmaker has a solid grasp on the concept of genre, they can use all of these elements at their disposal to form their work. Once they have that understanding, they can then use different filmmaking techniques to shape the genre of their work as well.

The concept of genre is not necessarily steadfast and can be flexible and overlap in categories in many ways. If they understand what the characteristics of certain genres entail and the audience expectations that go along with them, filmmakers can play with genres and warp them to fit their storytelling needs in whatever ways they want. As mentioned, most films can be categorized into fitting into multiple genre categories, just based on the nature of how stories are

told. There will always be at least some elements of several genres in most movies that are made, even if a film has an obvious main genre.

There then is also the possibility for films to be considered as having hybrid genres. The distinction here is that a hybrid genre film would be a film that intentionally spans several specific genres and puts almost equal weight on them, as opposed to being a film with a main genre and then succeeding subgenres, which again, most films are. These types of films intentionally blend genres to create something new and unique. This once again goes back to the concept of audience expectations. If a film has multiple, distinct genres that are being crossed together, it can lead to a fresh and entertaining experience for the audience, because they might not know what to really expect. These types of films can be simply a blend of two genres, or even go into the realm of genre-bending. Genre-bending is when a film might have multiple genres, but as opposed to being succinctly blended together for the entirety of the film, different scenes might bend into different genres as the story unfolds. These types of works can offer numerous possibilities for storytelling and they can have the potential to be incredibly successful. They can have the possibility of succeeding in giving the audience a fresh and fun experience by subverting their expectations. However, there is also a possibility that they fail miserably because they are too scattered and all over the place in the executions of the different genres. There is also the possibility that they could turn out simply mediocre, simply because they were not able to find a groove between whatever genres they were blending, and the final product ends up falling flat because it was spread too thin between multiple genres and tones.

All that being considered, hybrid genres and genre-bending can be extremely enjoyable and compelling, of which there are many examples^{1 2 3} of that can be discussed endlessly when examining the subject. Hybrid genres can be blends of two or more genres, again putting emphasis on each genre in a way that one does not have an obvious importance over another. There are many storytelling and filmmaking techniques that can go into this concept. If a filmmaker has a solid understanding of genres, what goes causes them to be categorized the way that they are, and the audiences' expectations related to genre, they can use this knowledge to their advantage to make great genre-bending films that succeed in entertainment and cinematic value.

The article "What is Genre and How Is It Determined?" (Reich 2017), states that the genre of a work (specifically in the context of film) is determined by four elements or parts, which are character, story, plot, and setting. Those elements certainly are vastly important when examining the genre of a film and need to be present and considered whenever a film is made and is trying to adhere to a certain genre or genres. This alludes to the writing of a film being essential to its genre, which is true. A film set in a haunted house about a serial killer brutally murdering people would be hard-pressed to be considered a comedy if one were to base their genre categorization strictly off of the four elements listed above. In filmmaking, storytelling should in the end be paramount, and one cannot tell a good story without those four elements being present. However, there can also be more distinct and nuanced things that can affect the genre of a film, which is specifically what this creative project will be focusing on.

¹ *Baby Driver* (Wright, 2017). The film blends action, heist film, and musical genres.

² *Logan* (Mangold, 2017), blends superhero, action, and western genres.

³ *A Simple Favor* (Feig, 2018), blends comedy, mystery, and thriller genres.

Any good filmmaker knows that the aesthetics of a film play a major role in its genre. The way a film looks, sounds, and feels can affect the genre in a variety of ways. Aesthetic elements of films have subconscious effects on how audiences view and experience the themes and plots of a story, as well as the film as a whole. If a filmmaker has a strong grasp on how these aesthetics choices can have an impact on and shape the genre of their work, they can use those same aesthetics to alter and bend the genre of a film in ways that the audience might not have expected. This, of course, is normally the goal when a film blatantly bends and combines genres. Having control of these aesthetic elements and using them to create and alter genre is an important tool for a filmmaker and can help them shape the genre(s) of their work. This can be in addition to just the base elements that Reich mentioned such as story, plot, and characters. For film, the genre of a work always comes back to audience expectations and when filmmakers use these aesthetic choices to alter and bend genres of their films, audiences might not know what to expect, leading to a refreshing and interesting experience when consuming a movie.

The primary goal of this project is to examine the use of strict aesthetics to create, alter, and bend the genre of a film. This project is solely examining those elements and their effect on genre, intentionally excluding any changes to the elements of character, plot, setting, etc. This examination is to be showcased in a short film, *Don't Croak*, which was written, shot, and produced by myself and a small film crew during the winter of 2021. The film is meant to be an examination of a genre-bender, where the genre of the film is altered in certain scenes and goes back and forth between genres. The idea of this project and film is to examine if the genre of events happening in a film can be altered strictly through the manipulation of certain aesthetic elements and nothing else. The examination is meant to explore the idea that a film could possibly bend genres in certain scenes without changes to the plot, story, characters, setting, or

any other genre-effecting elements. While those elements are still crucial to filmmaking, genre, storytelling in general, this project aims to find out if one can effectively alter the genre of something without changing those base elements.

Once the film is viewed, audience members will be able to decide whether or not the film was successful in altering the genre of a scene (or of the film as a whole) through the use of aesthetic changes, which include things such as cinematography, editing, and sound. Furthermore, it aims to provide good insight to other filmmakers about how to implement and use aesthetics to their advantage in filmmaking, whether they are bending genres or not. Even if this film ends up essentially failing in effectively bending genres through aesthetics, those style choices are still an important part of helping shape genre and tone for any film, especially if a filmmaker is wanting to tinker with its genre. If a filmmaker knows the concept of genre, what goes into it (in this case, specifically aesthetics), and what they can do to accentuate or alter it without changing the overarching plot or events of the story, then they will be a stronger filmmaker. To reiterate, the goal is to see if these aesthetics changes can be enough to bend the genre of scenes without changing what happens in the film and to look at how big of an impact those aesthetics changes have.

CHAPTER II: Review of Literature

PART I: Understanding Genres and their Aesthetic Qualities

Before I began producing my film, I needed to make sure I had a grasp on the overall concept of genre, and more specifically for the sake of this project, specific characteristics associated with certain genres. While genres surely take great importance from the four elements Reich listed, there are other things that can determine them as well that I needed to recognize. These influences can include things such as geography, culture, or the time period something

was created (White & Hider, 2020). These are other factors that can play into genre quite heavily. For example, one thing that is considered to be frightening in one culture could seem mundane in another. The plight of one group of people could have a deep emotional impact on one set of audience members, while others might be unbothered, thus effectively and essentially altering the way a film is perceived and categorized. The time period in which a film is created could similarly impact the way the events or tone are perceived. Not only that, but the time period could affect the reason a certain genre is the goal for a film. A great example of this is the genre of film noir, which are films about dark subject matter that came about after the melancholic world view produced by the events of the second World War.

There could be current political or social issues as well that could be either reflected in or accentuated in a film's genre intentionally or unintentionally. To further explain this, there is one genre, one that is more likely a subgenre, that is labeled "urban-high-school drama." While the events of films in that genre could or could not have the potential to be remarkable as far as thematic storytelling, the genre itself has connotations that audience members could bring into it, thus effecting the overall genre of the film and how it is perceived by viewers. One author argues that this specific genre has the potential to reinforce notions about the certain sects of people being portrayed, such as the "culture of poverty" (Bulman, 2002). People that could possibly agree with that notion, such as middle-class persons, could then form their own views on the genre of the movie, as they culturally view things differently than, say, someone who has an easier job relating to whatever is happening on screen. This of course is just one simple example, but it proves a point. It quickly becomes apparent that there are numerous factors that can help determine the genre of a film, including cultural factors and time period. Story, characters, plot, setting, timeframe, culture, and geography all can have an impact. For my project, if I did not

have an understanding of genre and these things that can affect it, then my exploration into genre-bending would be starting from a place of ignorance.

Genre is clearly important to film industry, again referring back to audience expectations. Where would we be without the different genre categories on our favorite streaming services? Without these (while sometimes loose) categorizations, some people would be dead in the water when trying to find the type of movie they were in the mood to watch. While the concept of genre can be permeable, it is clear that there at least general rules in place to try and categorize a certain work or film. This clearly relates to the subject matter, tone, plot, and mood of a film, but there are other factors that can be at play, once again such as marketing. Think about the title of a film. Any film worth its salt will have a title that is not only intriguing and desirable to movie audiences, but also indicates its genre as well. This includes not only the actual name of the title, but aspects such as the font that the title is presented in (Haidegger, 2015). This also proves that aesthetics are a large factor of genre is how things are presented, which is exactly what I am exploring. Although my project focuses purely on aesthetics and their impact on genre, it is important to note these other genre-affecting factors.

Since the goal of the project was to alter and bend the genre of scenes only through the use of aesthetics, I needed to make sure I had a solid understanding of what these specific aesthetics would be related to certain genres. If I went into this project without that knowledge, I would have had nowhere to start and would have had no idea what aesthetics to alter when trying to implement them to bend genre. By knowing what specific aesthetics are associated with specific genres, then I could effectively use those aesthetics to hopefully create and bend into the genres that I wanted to, which I decided early on would be comedy and horror.

PART I-A: Comedy Genre

Comedy films are normally pretty simple. They are meant to provide humor to the audience. They are designed to provide us with usually lighthearted entertainment and amusement. In short, their purpose is to make us laugh and feel good. There are numerous subgenres of comedy, such as romantic comedy, screwball comedy, black comedy, etc., that all have their own specific tropes, characteristics, and aesthetics. However, the aesthetics for most comedies remain pretty consistent and simple across the board.

The aesthetics of comedy coincide quite clearly with the overall goal and tone of the genre: they are upbeat, happy, and fun. The lighting and color palette of a comedy film is normally very bright and light. In film, lighting that creates harsh shadows and fast fall-offs create drama and suspense. Darker and more muted color grades also have this effect. So, it makes sense that comedy films would normally do the opposite in their look and feel. In comedy, there normally isn't meant to be serious and dramatic content, save for maybe a few scenes. The audience is supposed to enjoy the humorous things that they are seeing and hearing on screen. The mood and tone of these films are upbeat, so there is no need for dramatic lighting or dark colors that create a serious and tense aesthetic.

There might be times where this isn't always the case in a comedy, like if there is a serious scene where a character is at their lowest of lows or something similar to that in the script and/or plot. But, for the most part, the look of the films is bright and evenly lit. The audience is meant to get enjoyment from the humorous things they are hearing and seeing and it would not make much sense for there to be dramatic and dark lighting. That style of lighting would not fit the tone of the genre and would probably take away from the humor. If dramatic and stylized lighting did appear in a comedy, it would most likely be exaggerated to a point where the way

that a scene is lit actually becomes part of a joke. For example, a film could have dramatic lighting in a scene where the events in that scene are completely ludicrous or silly. Adding dramatic lighting could make the absurdity of the scene even funnier and turn the lighting and cinematography into a punchline of their own. But, that is much less common than the brighter and flat style of lighting for most comedies. When watching a comedy, the audience is looking for humor and amusement, not serious drama or tension and the visual aesthetics of comedy films reflect that.

The sound design for comedies also falls in line with this trend. Most music or sound used is often happy and lighthearted in tone. Similar to lighting and color, if dramatic or intense music is used, then it is once again probably being used as a joke itself to accentuate the humor of a scene. Generally, it would not make sense for somber or melancholic sound design/music to be playing throughout the soundtrack of a comedy film. Sound effects are also sometimes used to emphasize humorous things happening as well.

Camerawork and editing for comedies are normally pretty simple, as well. The compositions of shots are normally pretty mundane and unremarkable, as once again they are not meant to create any sort of dramatic effect or serious mood and are meant to simply show us the funny things we are seeing and hearing on screen. However, sometimes the framing or composition of a shot can be used for its own comedic effect. An example of this could be where a shot is framed so that there is something funny happening in the background, even if the actual subject of the shot is more in the foreground and doing something simple like having a conversation. The editing of comedies can also do something similar to this, where the way a scene is cut can add to the humor of said scene.

As I have mentioned several times, the aesthetics of comedies are pretty simple. Even if a comedy film does have some serious overarching message behind it, the overall tone of comedies is meant to be humorous and amusing. The aesthetics of the genre reflect that tone, as they do with all genres. The audience is supposed to laugh and have fun, so there is not really a need for aesthetic choices that create drama or suspense or tension. Any use of dramatic aesthetic techniques is more than likely a joke in and of itself. The lighting and colors are bright and even, the sound design is upbeat, and there normally isn't any kind of crazy camerawork or editing.

PART I-B: Horror Genre

Where comedies are meant to provide entertainment through laughter and amusement, horror films are meant to cause fear, dread, and other unsettling emotions to provide entertainment. The elements of character, story, plot, and setting clearly play a big role in this as well. Horror films normally follow tragic or disturbing events that are often filled with evil, supernatural forces, monsters, ghouls, killers, etc., and often take place in a variety of creepy locations. All of that is important to the genre, but once again aesthetics also play a huge role in creating the sense of dread that a horror film is trying to elicit from an audience. These aesthetics are normally dissimilar to that of a comedy, but there are also specific nuances to the aesthetics of horror films as well.

The lighting and color palettes of almost all horror films are dark and scary. A lot of this is done through the use of shadows and the absence of light. Harsh, dramatic, fast falloff lighting is used to create tense and eerie scenes on screen. A large amount of fear in films comes from things that we cannot see, so the use of darkness and shadows is prevalent in the horror genre. Most people are at least somewhat inherently afraid of the dark, so it makes complete sense that horror films would be dark when it comes to lighting and color. Our brains automatically conjure

up dreadful things that we cannot see if we look into a dark room or space. A lot of horror comes from fear of the unknown, so using darkness and dramatic lighting helps create this feeling. Even if we can see whatever monster or ghost that is chasing a character, it clearly will be scarier if it is happening in dark areas. A monster figure such as Michael Myers is less scary walking around in broad daylight than he is in a dark and dimly lit hallway. As with any genre, there are of course exceptions to this, such as the film *Midsommar* (Aster, 2019), where all of the events take place outside in the bright of day and everything is lit. But, for the most part, horror films have dramatic and dark lighting schemes to help create the creepy and dreadful tone that the genre is based on.

The color palettes of horror movies mostly follow this idea as well. Colors used are often dark and muted and do not pop with vibrancy or contrast. These types of colors coincide with the drab tone of horror films. If the colors were all light and bright, it would detract from the goal of creating feelings of dread or fear with an audience. Just like lighting (or any aesthetic element), there are of course exceptions to this, too. Horror films like *The Shining* (Kubrick, 1980) or *Crimson Peak* (del Toro, 2015) use an overabundance of vibrant color to shock the viewers' senses and make them feel uneasy because that much stark color is not natural. Another good point to make is that blue and green colors are a commonly used color in horror. These colors create a sickly and melancholic feel when applied to a film.

The sound design for horror films falls in line with the goal of disturbing viewers as well. Any music used is normally dark, melancholic, or morosely intense. Shriill and unnatural songs and sounds are used to create feelings of unrest. The sound design in horror is not meant to be pleasant, rather quite the opposite. It is meant to be something that makes someone squirm in their seat when they hear it and it is immensely important to any good horror flick. A dark empty

room might be creepy to look at, but if unsettling and loud music is played, the image becomes that much more sinister seeming. On the other hand, a monster chasing someone would be much less scary if a cheerful song was playing in the background as opposed to some unpleasant and intense music screeching unwaveringly. Sound effects are also very commonly used to accentuate horror. This could be something like a creepy noise heard in the background of a shot to add scary ambiance to a scene, or a loud bang when a jump-scare happens intending to startle the viewer. Either way, the sound design for horror films is meant to be unsettling and unpleasant. If a pleasant or happy sounding song is played, it is more than likely being used as a contrast to whatever horror is happening on the screen, thus giving the song its own dreadful quality. This is similar to how a comedy film might use overly dramatic lighting for comedic effect.

The goal of horror aesthetics is always the same: to entertain by creating feelings of fear and dread. The aesthetics are meant to make the world and characters of the genre feel unnatural, creepy, and wrong. Lighting is usually dark, dramatic, and ominous, and this is normally achieved through the absence of light and the use of lots of shadows. Sound design is unnerving and creepy, through the use of shrill and unpleasant music and sound effects. Just like with any genre, these common aesthetic choices are what truly help shape the genre and its overall tone.

PART I-C: Summary of Aesthetics

After solidifying this base knowledge about different genres, specifically comedy and horror for this project, and their associated aesthetics, I could then start venturing into and exploring the world of hybrid genres and genre-benders. In general, I found it to be quite surprising that there seemed to be a decently sufficient lack of formal academic literature and research on the specific concept of genre-bending, especially with a focus being on the medium

of film. If my project was a full-blown traditional thesis paper, I certainly could have made the argument that there is enough absence of formal academic literature on the subject that it would warrant the basis for further academic examination and research. Even though this project is not a research-based thesis paper, I will still formally state that I do believe more academic research and discussion on the subject of genre-bending in movies would be beneficial and useful to the filmmaking discipline and its related academia. There exists a veritable plethora of academic literature on the concept of genre, but genre-bending literature is much harder to locate.

My overall goal for this project is not to simply argue that there needs to be more literature on the subject. The purpose of this project is to more so explore specifically how aesthetics can alter and shape genres if those are the only elements being changed, as opposed to making some argument about existing formal literature or in this case, the lack thereof.

PART II: Examples of Genre-Bending Films

I also realized early on that some good "literature" to review for this project would be to simply research and watch films that have hybrid genres or films that bend into multiple genres as well. One could again probably argue that almost every film ever made is technically some sort of hybrid genre, as there are almost always elements of other genres or subgenres present in accompaniment to the main genre, however, I am specifically referring to films that are true hybrid genres and genre-benders, where the hybridity is truly significant, and they do not fit into one genre more than the other. By watching these types of movies, I was able to gain a better understanding of how genre-bending can work. I could take note of what worked well in the films when it came to the bending and hybridity as well as what didn't work, and then take that knowledge and implement it into the methodology for my own project.

An example of a well-known hybrid genre film, one that is also highly regarded, is *Blade Runner* (Scott, 1982). The film is set in a dystopian future where fake humanoids called “replicants” play a major role in the plot. The reason this film is a good example of a hybrid genre is because it is both the science fiction and film noir genres at the same time. It is not more of one than the other, thus why it is a great example of a hybrid film, one that is also regarded by most as very good. An important thing to note here is that the film’s aesthetics blend perfectly together in their look and execution. The film is full of vibrant colors that are commonly associated with the tones and stories of science fiction, while also having extremely dark and contrasted lighting and shadows, a definitive aesthetic characteristic of film noir.

Another aspect that is important to mention is that some genres lend themselves to be molded together better than others, which I would argue is the case for *Blade Runner*. But, that does not mean any two genres cannot be combined, just that some blend together easier. In the academic article “*Blade Runner* and Genre Film: Film Noir and Science Fiction” (Doll & Faller, 1986) the term “multi-generic” is coined as a way of describing the film, as the authors, too, argue that it is a perfect blend of two genres. They also reiterate my earlier point about how there is a difference between films having elements of more than one genre and true hybrid genre films:

We realize the potential for any film to employ conventions of more than one genre, but these films are not necessarily what we would call multi-generic because their various stylistic and narrative characteristics seem homogenized so that only one culturally recognized genre dominates. Multi-generic films, on the other hand, do not homogenize their various conventions, thus failing to emphasize one particular genre and perhaps causing problematic genre classification for the spectator.

(p. 89)

An example of a film that I watched when trying to further my understanding of the topic of hybrid genres was *Cowboys & Aliens* (Favreau, 2011). Just by reading the title, one can probably assume if the film's genre will be hybrid or multi-generic, as Doll and Faller put it. This film centers literally centers around its namesake, where the plot is about a town in the Old West that is attacked by aliens from the future. While that premise might sound absurd, that fact alone is not necessarily why the film failed especially failing in its blending of its two very different genres.

The film struggles in its hybridity because of a possible problem I mentioned earlier, where the genres and tones are too jarringly different and spread too thin across the film. This is an issue that can easily occur with hybrid genre films. If the tones in the genres this despairingly different and are not made harmonious, the entire film fails. Where *Blade Runner* was able to blend genres well into a cohesively and objectively good film (again, probably in part to its two genres being more suited to work together), *Cowboys & Aliens* fails at this because it literally feels like two separate movies that are stitched together. To be clear, I am not even referring to the absurd plot as the sole reason for this, the film's aesthetics and just overall tone do not jive well between the genres.

For example, the color grades for the different scenes that span between the desert and the futuristic spaceship are glaringly different. This was more than likely a stylistic choice to try and differentiate the genres and environments in the story, but I think that is another area of the film that the filmmakers messed up. By doing this, the aesthetics themselves were so jarring and distracting that the movie as a whole began to fall apart. There indeed could exist out there, in a different reality, where the concept of having cowboys fight futuristic aliens could possibly be made to work, but this film is not it. By watching this film, I could get great insight in what not

to do when trying to blend genres. First, the story must make at least some sense, and then secondly and more importantly for my purposes, the tone and aesthetics have to be able to work together to end up creating a final product that works. There are of course countless other movies I could reference that bend genres and combine them, some good and some bad. But, being able to recognize how and why the blending of genres did or did not work for a film is what is most important for my purposes here, which I think both of these films I have listed do a great job of showcasing.

PART III: Filling the Problem Space

While my film certainly will not be the first genre-bending film to ever be created, I think the problem space that I can address with my work is to examine the effects of genre-bending when using the same script and the same story events. I have never heard of something like that being done, specifically focusing on how aesthetics can affect genre, with a final product that allows one to compare those effects directly and see just how important aesthetics can be to the concept of genre. Sure, most filmmakers know that certain genres have certain looks, as I have already touched on. And, once again, there are surely many, many other factors that can go into trying to categorize a film into a certain genre. However, being able to see the exact same story and events occur but with altered aesthetics (and unaltered other factors) that will come from all stages of production, I think it will certainly be a great look into the importance of aesthetics and their impact on genre. If I learned anything from *Cowboys & Aliens*, then I should have a better understanding of how to blend these different genres while still making a film that works on its own, even if one does not watch the two versions side-by-side. Even if I fail in this regard and my film is considered horrible, I will still be providing insight into this concept because one

could go back and see why my film didn't work in the bending of genres because of the aesthetic changes, which are the only things being changed.

CHAPTER III: Methodology

PART I: Idea and Script

The primary approach to this project started out the same as most processes would be for planning, producing, and completing a short film. I came up with the idea and premise, figured out how I wanted to execute that idea, wrote a script, pre-produced the film, and then I would shoot the film and finish it up in postproduction.

First, for the basis of the project, my idea was for it to be a short film examining the impact of aesthetics on its genre that had one, singular script. Since the goal of the project is to examine the bending and altering of genres through the use of only aesthetics, I knew that the aesthetics were all that I would change, and I would not change the events of what happened in the script at all. This meant that I would write one script, where the same plot events happened in the same way and all that I would be altering would be the genre of certain scenes through the aesthetic changes I would be making. A full copy of the shooting script can be found in Appendix C. Since I wanted to play with the idea of a genre-bender, where the genre of a film changes in different scenes as the film progresses, I came up with the idea of having two different versions of my film, to be able to compare different versions of aesthetic changes to certain scenes. The goal would be to transition through three different genres: drama, comedy, and thriller/horror. The idea was that the film's "base" genre would be considered drama. By this, I mean that the film would start off seeming like a regular, generic drama in its nature and genre. Then, the events of the story would play out. But, in three different instances in the script, the

genre of those moments would bend into something else. This is where it really made sense to have two final cuts of the film, all using the same script, where the same scenes for both versions would have their genres bent. One cut of the film would be drama/comedy, and the other would be drama/thriller.

These three scenes where the genre shifts from drama to something else were written the same since again, I was only using one script for the entire project. I knew to be able to accomplish this project, especially with some of the limitations that were presented, that the script would need to be relatively simple, preferably between two characters in one location. I also chose to do this because this would allow me more of a chance to alter aesthetic choices on set when doing the scenes where the genre was meant to be bending. I felt that if the script was too complicated with too many moving parts or too large in length, then I would not be able to realistically and logistically complete it in the manner that I wanted to. Since this project is purely an examination of the effects that aesthetics have on the genre, I knew that the most accessible way to accomplish that would be to keep the story simple and uncomplicated as far as plot, structure, and characters. It is understood that those elements are still extremely important when crafting any story of any film, but for the sake of this project, I felt that keeping them as simple as possible would be the most useful to examine my ideas.

Then, the biggest challenge of writing the script presented itself. If I wanted to be at all successful in bending the genres of a script through aesthetics, I would need to be able to write scenes that could come off as hopefully both funny and/or creepy, to be able to effectively bend into the different two different genres that I wanted to explore. This was certainly the most daunting task of writing the script because these plot events had to be able to be altered through only aesthetics and not how they were written. It was certainly an interesting task to try and think

of story points that could come off as either genre, while also being something we could reasonably shoot for this project.

In the end, I came up with concepts that I felt were decently sufficient in lending themselves to being bent through aesthetics. For example, there are many things in life that can be interpreted in different ways, completely through how they are shown and depicted. So, I knew I had to create moments in the film that were not too far in one direction. If something weird were to occur in the script, I had to make sure that I could try to play it for both hilarity and creepiness. If in a script, a person gets hit in the face with, let's say, a rubber chicken, regardless of context, it would be decently difficult to try and make that seem effectively terrifying. Of course, this again harkens back to the point that storytelling and writing are absolutely essential to good filmmaking as a whole, as well as genre, but, for the purpose of this project, I had to try to write things that were as “neutral” as possible in the way that they could be presented and bent through the use of different aesthetics.

Another important distinction when formulating this idea was that I had to make a decision on what aesthetics I would be altering to effectively bend genres without changing the overall story or events that happen in the story. I decided that the aesthetics I would change would be lighting, color, sound, and editing. I also realized early on, that to fully illustrate my point concerning changing aesthetics and not the story, I would need the actors in my film to perform the events of the script in the same way with the same mannerisms for both versions. Although one could possibly argue that an actor's performance would qualify as an aesthetic quality of a film, I felt that for the sake of my project, having the actors give the same performance for each version would be crucial to the entire examination that the project is focusing on.

If the cast of my film were to act out the same story events for both versions but altered the way that they delivered their performance, that would surely be a very impacting aspect to how the audience perceived the genre of the scene. This is especially relevant to this project. If the actors changed their performances based on the context of the genre, even if it was still the exact same events occurring in the story, it would certainly take viewers' attention away from the aesthetic changes being made. Not only that, but it would also basically detriment the entire idea of what's being examined in the project. While acting performances can certainly be another aspect that adds to creating and emphasizing the genre of a film, they are not what I wanted to alter for the sake of this project, since the goal was to alter things purely aesthetically.

PART II: Preproduction

With this project coming to fruition during the middle of the COVID-19 worldwide pandemic, preproduction was certainly affected by that in several ways. I knew I had to keep my crew small and do everything I possibly could to make sure that the set would be safe. This of course also had a fairly substantial impact on the process of recruiting people to be involved as well. Ball State University was already all online by the end of 2020 going into 2021, so I had to reach out to people entirely over the internet and phone to try and get a small crew together to make this project happen. If the pandemic was not a factor, it certainly would have been easier to recruit people face-to-face on campus or from classes I was taking. Not only was it harder to reach out to people, but some people that I was able to contact did not want to take part because of the risks that having a certain number of people around in one area could present.

It certainly took some effort, but through some helpful networking through some of the other members of my graduate cohort and my graduate advisor, I was slowly but surely able to recruit members to help me on my crew. I was able to get a director of photography, Brooke

Wellington, a gaffer, Garrett Looker, a field audio person, Jordan Flora, an assistant director, Ameliah Kolp, a key grip, Drew Kissel and finally two actors, Valerie Stoffer and Devion Ross, to play the roles in my script. These people were or are all Ball State students as well, so we were all able to shoot in Muncie without having to add any more difficulty by trying to find people to commute into town or trying to shoot in a location other than Muncie. It was very reassuring to find enough people that were interested to help out and be involved. Had I not been able to assemble the crew that I did, the shooting of the film would probably not have happened when it did and would have been substantially harder to shoot and complete.

The next step in the process was to find a location to shoot my film in. As previously mentioned, I knew my goal was to keep the location for shooting in Muncie, and that had been my plan all along for several logistical reasons. By making sure the shooting location was in Muncie, that helped make it easier for planning and coordinating shoot dates with my crew. If I had tried to shoot in a location outside of town, it certainly would have added extra hurdles to overcome when trying to coordinate the shoot. Not only that, but I figured it would certainly be difficult to find any outside location that would allow a crew to shoot there, once again considering the pandemic.

I wrote the script to be set in a residential home because from the beginning I again knew that it would be hard to find somewhere to shoot in the winter, while still considering the global pandemic. I also set my film in a house because I knew it could be a more controlled environment to be able to alter and play with the aesthetics of my film. Shooting in a house would give us much more control over the lighting, blocking, and other things such as that when shooting, and it also allowed us to not have to be dependent on things such as outdoor weather conditions or being in a public place. After determining that shooting in a house would best suit

the needs of my project both artistically and logistically, I quickly then realized that that would mean I would have to ask someone to use their house to shoot in. I rent a one-bedroom apartment in Muncie that is on the third floor of an older building with no elevator, so I knew that I would not be able to shoot in my living quarters. Furthermore, I then repeatedly had to take COVID into consideration once again, as I knew it would be a lot to be asking of someone to allow a small film crew to come into their home for extended periods of time to get the shoot done. During my initial effort at location scouting, I was turned down several times, simply because of worries about the pandemic. Luckily, after some searching, I spoke to my Gaffer and he was willing and able to allow us to shoot at his house for the project, which ended up being quite convenient and worked out very nicely. It also ended up helping immensely with production, as we were able to store all of the film and sound equipment that I had rented at his house for the duration of the shoot, which was planned to take three days that were spread out over the course of about a week and a half. Being able to store the equipment at his house allowed us the luxury of not having to move all the gear every night to a different location after we would wrap on shooting for the day.

To also keep things as safe as possible on set concerning COVID and the pandemic, we decided on making every crew and cast member get tested for the virus within a week before we started shooting. This was probably the most important step we could initially take to make sure the set was as safe as possible before we even started. I then also required everyone to wear masks while on set, made sure we were going to be as socially distanced as possible while shooting, and that we had plenty of hand sanitizer and other cleaning products available and at the ready to keep surfaces and other materials sanitized. Ironically, while this project was certainly small in scale in areas such as the size of the production and crew, these are certainly

similar to the kinds of things that larger productions in the industry are having to go through to be able to keep productions operating smoothly and safely, while also keeping liability low and morale high.

While the pandemic was certainly a major factor in everything involved in completing this project, I think that we were able to execute it to the best of our abilities, keeping the limitations we faced in mind. I was able to mold the idea for my project into the confines of the pandemic-controlled world that exists right now, in a way that worked well with my ideas while also keeping everyone involved as safe as possible. I knew that safety was of the utmost importance during the planning and production of this film. The people in my crew and cast were going out of their way and were using their time and energy to help me with my project and the last thing I would have wanted to have happen would be to put them in any unnecessary danger, especially danger that I could take steps to prevent. It is unfortunate that that is the state of the world right now, but it is just the way things currently are. By taking the necessary precautions, such as having everyone get tested beforehand and wearing masks, we were successfully able to keep everyone safe during the entire shooting process. No one in the crew tested positive for COVID before the shoot, and no one ended up getting sick from the shoot, so in the end, the precautions we took worked out and we were able to have a safe shoot where no one was negatively impacted, which is something I think myself and my entire crew can be very proud of.

As far as preproduction logistics go that were unrelated to COVID, I once again handled the preparations like any other shoot for a short film of this size and caliber. After recruiting the team, I created a Slack channel for us all to communicate in. Slack is an online application that is meant for business coordination and planning. I was able to use this channel to communicate with the entire crew (as small as it was) at once, all within one application, which certainly

streamlined things and allowed everyone to be on the same page regarding what was happening and being planned for the project. Then, myself and my Director of Photography met via Zoom and went meticulously through the script and planned out a comprehensive shot list that I could send out to the crew and cast. We visualized each scene, including the blocking and the look I was going for and did our best to plan shots and their looks accordingly. Of course, this was made slightly more difficult because of the necessity to conduct the meeting online and not in person, but we still were able to coordinate our ideas effectively into a comprehensive set of base ideas for the shots we wanted. Next, I created a color-coded spreadsheet of our official shot list and sent that out via the Slack communication channel. I also used this shot list to plan out the most practical way to shoot the different scenes. This included the order the scenes were to be shot in, what shot setups we would need to use during a shoot, as well any other details needed to plan accordingly, such as suggested blocking we could implement into a scene. This comprehensive shot list can be found in Appendix D.

Lastly, after coordinating the availabilities of all of my cast and crew members, I compiled a shooting schedule that would best suit everyone. I then created official call sheets (found in Appendices E,F, and G), which indicated and informed industry-standard details about the shoot, such as the address we were shooting at, the time of day we would start shooting, who would be needed when, the scenes we would be shooting, as well as other details such as what the weather would be that day and where the nearest medical facility was located. The entire preproduction communication system I created worked quite well. We as a crew communicated effectively and were all for the most part on the same page and operated smoothly for the entirety of the production process.

PART III: Production

Production for *Don't Croak* was once again as standard as we could possibly make it, taking the limitations of the pandemic that we faced into consideration once again. We shot over the course of three days in early January of 2021 and were able to complete most of the shooting for the film during that time frame. After the main filming of the project concluded, I had a few things I wanted to get shots of as well as a few reshoots, so my director of photography, my gaffer, and myself met for a single small shoot for a few hours in early February to get the rest of what we needed. All in all, the shoots went as smoothly as I could have hoped, all things considered, and we ran into very few issues or hiccups during production. There were, of course, slight issues that every film set experiences, such as having to take time to painstakingly perfect a lighting set up for a certain shot, but overall, there were no major issues that impacted the production or its completion as a whole.

While working in person on set, there was namely only one thing that I wanted to alter to affect the genre of the specific scenes of the film, which was the lighting. I knew that a lot of the aesthetic changes I would be making would be happening during postproduction (color, sound, editing), so the lighting was really the only thing we could alter while physically shooting, especially since the goal was to keep the shots and performances consistent across genres. This, of course, meant that the scenes where the genre was meant to be bent would have to be shot twice, with two different lighting setups. I instructed the actors to give as similar of a performance as they could between all of the takes, no matter what the lighting setup was. My director of photography and I also did our best to replicate the shots between both lighting setups as accurately as possible. The shots themselves were another aspect that I did not want to alter while examining the idea for my project. Just as if the actors' performances were different

between each version of the film, if the shots themselves were different between versions it would have had an overarching effect on the film and its genre that would have been separate from the specific aesthetics I was trying to alter and change for my project. While the shots between the two different versions and lighting setups are of course not exactly the same, as far as framing, timing, etc. goes, we did our best to get them as close in look as possible.

To achieve this, we would shoot each shot with the two different lighting setups back-to-back. By this, I mean that we would set up one lighting configuration, block it, frame it, and shoot it, and then only change the lighting and shoot it again, in the most similar way as possible so that we could try to closely replicate the actors' performance timing, as well as the framing and look of the previous shot and setup. I originally considered trying to set up one lighting configuration, shoot the entire scene with said configuration, and then changing the setup and then shoot the other version of the scene its entirety like that. While that may have been more practical in certain regards (changing the lighting setup after each shot was completed was time-consuming), I found that it was easier to try to replicate the framing and timing of the shots if we did each version consecutively. This tactic allowed the actors to stay in the same headspace for the shots, as well as let them do their best at giving the same, consistent performance between the different lighting setups and versions of the takes. I felt that if we were to shoot the entire scene with all its shots, blocking, and one lighting setup and then tried to replicate that scene in totality afterward with the new lighting setup, we would probably be less likely to sufficiently replicate the shots and performances across the two versions. While the method we opted for was probably more time-consuming in the end, it proved to be worth it when trying to copy the essence and framing of one take onto another with a new lighting setup without losing our groove.

For the different lighting setups, I made sure my entire crew understood what the process was going to be and what the overall idea was. I specifically told my gaffer a simple premise: one lighting setup needs to be flat, bright, and even (for the comedy version) and one needs to be more dramatic and harsher looking (for the horror version). Luckily, as previously stated, we were only going to change the lighting setups for three instances in the script. Only those three instances in the film and the shots associated with them needed to be done twice, and the rest of the scenes only needed to be shot once with one lighting setup, as those scenes were to be portrayed in the “base” genre of drama and needed to be the same for both versions.

When first approaching lighting, we started off using a simple 3-point approach, at least for the scenes that were not meant to be as dramatic. This approach would be a key light, a fill light, and then usually some kind of back/hair light. This is one of the first approaches one learns when being educated on lighting, as it allows the subjects to be well lit while also adding contrast between the background and the subject. Since the film takes place at night, we also knew from the start that we would have to introduce enough light into the scenes so that the footage we captured would not be underexposed or noisy. We also knew we would have to accomplish this using our own lights, since the practical lighting that already existed in the house that we were shooting in was, for the lack of a better word, terrible. We did end up using several accent lamps in several shots, but we knew that we would not be using those for any of our important light sources to light our subjects.

After we would first try and implement the 3-point lighting setup approach, we would then try to light the background and the rest of the scene. This also played into our blocking as well. To light certain scenes, again to make sure the camera would have adequate exposure, we would have to set up lights in the background of shots. When it came to blocking, we had to keep

the positioning of those lights in mind when planning out the movement and framing for each scene. This mattered both for making sure the lighting looked consistent throughout each scene, as well as making sure none of these lights were visible in the background of shots. This did prove to be difficult in several instances, as the house we were shooting in was not very large. This caused us to have to constantly think on the fly, as well as constantly tweak lighting setups in between shots to make things work. This, of course, is not uncommon on any film shoot, professional or otherwise.

As for equipment, we chose to primarily use Feliix brand LED light kits, of which I rented two. These kits had the advantages of not using too much power, not getting too hot on set, as opposed to something like tungsten light kits, and having the ability to change the color temperature by simply turning a knob on the back of the light. I knew these were the lights that I wanted to use from the very beginning because I knew of their benefits and versatility. When using these lights, we would either use traditional light stands or set them up using components from a grip kit to get them placed where we needed them. Again, we were shooting in a small space, so we had to be flexible in our approach. We also heavily used diffusion flags to diffuse, bend, and alter the lights. While we needed to make sure we had enough light, in certain shots taking place in smaller areas of the house, we ran into having too much harsh light, so diffusion was a must. Once again, we also got creative with the grip kit in our placements, sometimes hiding a light attached to a banister on the ceiling or concealing it underneath something such as a chair. We also used a large HMI light to place outside to mimic the look of moonlight spilling into the house. Practical lights were present as well, but they were not used as primary sources to light a scene and were mainly used to accentuate the overall look.

To achieve the looks I wanted for the scenes that would bend genre, separated from our base, traditional lighting setups, we used a variety of different techniques. We would end up normally lighting a shot for the comedy version first, in a flat and even manner that would make sense for that style, while still of course aiming to make the shots look professional, well-done, and aesthetically pleasing. Comedies are known for having evenly dispersed and undramatic lighting, as they are meant to be lighthearted and funny, so dramatic and harsh lighting with things such as fast fall-offs and heavy use of shadows would not make much sense since the humor is the most important part, and that type of lighting would normally imply drama and take away from whatever comedic moment is occurring on screen. Of course, there could be instances where dramatic/cinematic lighting could be used for comedic effect, such as if it was intentionally overdone, but, again, that would not fit very well into the parameters for the overall idea of my project is going for.

After we would shoot the comedy version, we would usually remove at least one or two of the lights that we had for that setup and see how that affected the look. Occasionally, simply removing a few lights did grant us a look that I felt sufficient for making the lighting more dramatic and creepier. If that was not enough, we would re-light the shot to create a more sinister and/or simply more dramatic look. By starting with the flatter, comedic lighting, it made it easier to create contrast and harsher falloffs and shadows when we simply removed or turned off some lights. To increase the quality of the horror-genre shots, we would occasionally add gels to lights, primarily CTB (blue) or green, to add another layer of color, contrast, and mood to the shot. Blue and green are colors commonly associated with horror, as they can create sickly, unpleasant, or melancholic looks and moods. Overall, this methodology proved to work out well during production, as the flat, comedic lighting was obviously easier to achieve first and then we would

tackle the more dramatic lighting for the same shot afterward, which could take slightly more time. By doing the easier setup first and getting it out of the way efficiently, we were then able to subsequently take more time on the more difficult, dramatic look.

To reiterate, the lighting was the only aesthetic aspect being altered during the shoots to change the genre. I recognized early on during preproduction that if the actors' performances were to be the same for both genres, as well as the framing of the shots between both versions, then most of the actual aesthetic changes would end up occurring during the postproduction phase. Lighting was still an essential part of this, though, and like any film project, it took a while to tweak to get right. But, knowing our direction and goals, a system to achieve that direction and goals, we were able to light the scenes well, while also being able to alter different setups to bend the genre of certain scenes. See Appendices A and B to see some clear cut examples of how these different lighting setups and techniques were used to effectively differentiate between the genres.

PART IV: Postproduction

While having to shoot some scenes twice might seem somewhat onerous, most of the heavy lifting when it came to aesthetic changes was carried out during the postproduction process. First, to carry out my idea about examining the concept of strictly the aesthetics bending the genre, I knew that the two separate cuts of the film had to be harmonious, while also distinctly different. This meant that I needed to make sure that the edits, color correction/grades, and audio for the scenes that were not being bent in their genre had to be practically identical, or as close to identical as possible. Since my goal was to only bend the genre in those fixed three instances, I needed the rest of the film to remain consistent, acting almost like a control group in a scientific experiment. If those sections of the film that were meant to remain consistent and

identical had glaring and obvious discrepancies, then once again the entire idea that that project is meant to examine would become mute.

To accomplish this, I first made rough edits of both versions of the film. To streamline things, I edited one version first, which was the horror version, and then saved it and then took that edit back into the editing software (I used Adobe Premiere Pro) and then simply replaced the differently lit scenes to create the comedy version of my film. By doing this, I was able to keep the "base" drama scenes almost identical in the edit. There are a few slight discrepancies in each version of those scenes, but the only reason for any differences was to match edits related to the footage for each version so that each edit would work thematically or logistically, such as matching a cut on the action or movement of a character for the different shots. The overall pacing of the two different edits is very similar, but again, not identical. This was again partially due to me trying to make sure the edits were as smooth as possible with the footage I had, while also being slightly aesthetically driven when it came to tweaking the overall feel of each cut of the film for the aesthetic changes I was making.

Once I had rough cuts completed for both genres, I imported the timelines of the edits into Davinci Resolve, which is a non-linear video editing software that has arguably the best color-correcting abilities in the industry. For the color correction/grade of the two versions of the film, I once again had to make sure that the scenes not having their genre bent through aesthetics looked the same in both edits. Just like the lighting and editing of the film, these scenes were to remain constant throughout the project. To achieve this, I first color corrected and color graded those scenes where the genre was not being changed. Once I had the color where I wanted it for those scenes, I used the "grab still" function that Davinci offers, which grabs a selected frame and saves the color grade of that frame for later use. Then, after completing one version, I was

able to simply apply the grades from those frames to the same shots in the next version to make them look identical without having to go back in and redo the entire color grade for shots I had already done in the previous cut.

After doing base color-correction of the footage for both versions (again, keeping those certain un-bent scenes as identical as possible), I was then ready to move on to the more artistic color grades for the three different instances where the genre was to be affected. For the comedy version, I wanted to make sure to keep the color grade flat, bright, and as even as possible, just as I had done with the lighting in production. This meant that I actually did not have to alter much after the initial color correction, as the lighting for those scenes helped the clips already seem decently sufficient for the look I was going for. For the horror version of the edit, I added a slightly blue/green grade to the scenes that were to have their genre bent, to give the shots a sickly/unpleasant feel regarding their color space. I would also mess with the shadows, blacks, and exposure, to make the shots seem darker and more ominous overall.

During the entire postproduction process, especially during the color grading, my idea was to make sure that the changes I made weren't *too* drastic. By this, I mean that I didn't want the certain color changes I made to the genre-bending scenes to be so obviously different from the rest of the scenes of the film that they were jarring or over-the-top. Remember *Cowboys & Aliens*? I did not want my aesthetic changes to so noticeable like that film where it actually detracted from the entire thing. My goal was to make sure that each version of the film still worked without the aesthetic changes in certain scenes being so overbearing and in-your-face that they took away from the plot of the film or were distracting. My idea was to be as subtle as possible, while still creating enough of a distinct difference to help bend the genre of a scene one way or another.

For example, if the horror version of the film cut from the base drama scenes to a scene with too much of an extremely harsh and/or extremely noticeably bleak color grade, then it would immediately pull the audience out of the film because it would be so distracting. Sure, it might significantly alter the genre of a scene, but if the grade was too drastic it would take away from the flow of the film as a whole. And, yes, while the goal of this project is to examine the effects that aesthetic changes such as the color grade can have, I felt that if those changes were too on-the-nose and jarring, then it would defeat the purpose of examining a genre-bending movie because it would detract from the film as a whole. While working on the grades, I thought to myself that pretty much any person could take a piece of footage and dramatically color grade it into looking like it might have come out of a certain genre. However, I also thought that if I could be subtle with the changes that I made to the grade, while also still making a difference in the feel and genre of a scene, then that would be a great insight into the rest of my project, which is the entire approach I took to altering the color of my film(s). Once again, see Appendices A and B to observe several examples of the different genre color grades side-by-side.

Lastly, after finishing my color grades, I exported the edits back into Adobe Premiere and finished tweaking them in several ways. I first fixed audio levels and sound mixing to make sure that the audio wasn't peaking in any parts of the edit and was a consistent volume throughout. Next, and rounding out the final of the aesthetic changes I was going to make, I needed to decide on the music to include for the different versions. From the start, I already knew that music would be an important aesthetic element I could control to bend and alter the genre of the different scenes. However, I did once again wrestle with myself on how drastic to make the musical cues for the separate genres. I was initially worried that if I made the music too obvious or intense in the edit, then there was the possibility it could distract viewers from the other

aesthetic changes I was making to bend the genres. The effect that music alone can have on the tone and genre of a film could easily be its own study on its own, of which I am sure already exists.

Nonetheless, I understood that music had to be a part of the aesthetics I was changing because sound is an aesthetic quality in the medium of film. I knew that I wanted to alter it to affect the genre, as well as the fact that I again wanted to make sure that each version of the film could stand on its own and be an effective storytelling device. If the film didn't include any music, I felt that it would have made each version simply not as good in general. So, just as with the color grades, I tried to add music to the genre-bending sections that was not too rattling or exasperating concerning the overall film. Even more so, I made sure that the volume levels of the music were not too high so that the music could play a role in the bending of genres without being the main driving force behind those genre bends, hopefully still allowing attention to be focused on the other aesthetics involved.

Overall, the postproduction process for this project was where I was able to use aesthetics the most to alter the genres of the three separate scenes. Lighting still, and always will, remain as one of the most crucial aspects of the filmmaking process in general, as well as the base thing that will initially give a film its overall look. If I had the same lighting for all of the scenes I was meaning to genre-bend through strictly the use of aesthetics, I would have had much less freedom when trying to alter them for my needs during postproduction and it simply would not have been as effective. However, all that being considered, for the purpose of this project, lighting was only one of the aesthetic elements that were being altered. Postproduction certainly played a major role in my exploration of this concept and it would be foolish to diminish its importance. Without subtle editing, color grading, and audio mixing, the two versions of the

film, while they would still have differently lit scenes, would not be as effective in the examination of bending genres purely through the use of aesthetics, which goes beyond just how the scene was lit for the goal of my project.

CHAPTER IV: Discussion of the Project

Part I: Narrative of the Project

From the very beginning of this project, I knew I wanted to keep the narrative of the film simple and relatively short, in order to give myself as much flexibility and logistical control as possible when it came to altering the aesthetics. As I explained in the previous chapter, in aiming to accomplish my goal, I knew I needed to shoot three of the scenes twice, so that was always in my mind when crafting the overall story and plot of the film(s). Also, since I knew that I wanted the film to take place in a house with only two characters, I needed to figure out a plot that would make sense. After toying around with several ideas, I finally settled on having the story be about two people that are on a first date and one person is having the other over for dinner.

While I do realize that it would not be common for the first date between two people to occur at one of the person's houses rather than, say, a restaurant, I figured that it might make some sense considering the pandemic and the nature of public venues currently. Unfortunately, I failed to reference the pandemic anywhere in the script, which is one thing I would have changed when looking back on it. I think that a minor reference to the public restrictions everywhere would have been a simple and effective explanation as to why they would be having their first date at one of their houses.

Regardless, the narrative and basic premise of the script was that two people met online through some kind of dating app or chat room and the woman was coming over to the man's house for a dinner date. Then, when writing the script, I had to figure out plot events that could

happen that could hopefully lend themselves to being both either funny or creepy, depending on how they were portrayed through my use of aesthetics. I brainstormed for a while on this and finally settled on the idea that the man would have something to hide in his house. I came up with the idea that there would be a locked door that clearly looked important and mysterious, but that the man would deflect away from any mention of said door or what was behind it until the climax of the film, where he would finally reveal his secrets. I figured that this concept could lend itself to being portrayed in different genres. Does the man have something sinister behind the door? Or is whatever is behind it just something that is simply embarrassing/funny?

Next, I needed to decide what was going to be behind the door as the big reveal at the end, which I would also need to tie into the overall plot in a way that would make sense. One day during this process, while coming up with ideas and writing the script, I was casually watching an episode of *The Mandalorian* (Favreau et al., 2020), which is a show set in the *Star Wars* universe. The plot of the episode I was watching was based around a frog creature that was trying to transport her eggs to her homeworld. While observing this, I noticed that the frog woman was funny-looking, but also slightly creepy in a way. Thus, the idea suddenly came to me that the man in the story would have sculptures of frogs hidden behind his mysterious door. Just like the overall concept of the strange door, I felt that this was another thing that could lend itself to either horror or comedy based on how I chose to portray it. However, it still needed a way for it to make sense story-wise as to why this man would have weird frog sculptures hidden away in his basement. I also needed to think of other events where I could bend the genre that could tie into the "what's behind the door" concept. I settled on the idea that the man was an artist, as this could explain why he would have sculptures, as he would be creating them in his basement.

As for the other two events in the plot that I would be bending the genre, I decided to base them around those two ideas, being the frog sculptures and him being an artist. The first event is when the woman notices the strange and important-looking door as the man is escorting her to the kitchen after letting her into his house. As she takes notice of the door, she does a double-take and stops for a moment to look at it. To make the door seem more thematically important and noticeable, when shooting the scene, we put a light inside the room (that ended up being the door to a bathroom in the house we were shooting at) that would shine out of the keyhole and crack in the door, making the door seem all the more interesting and/or suspicious. When the woman notices the door and stops, as she is looking at it, the man violently throws his shoe at the door, startling her and breaking her concentration. He states that he thought he saw a fly as the reason for throwing his shoe. This again was another plot event that I believed could have its genre bent in different directions, that also emphasized the point that the door was important and that he did not want her going near it.

The second plot event that I came up with that could have its genre bent related back to him being an artist. I felt that if one genre-bent scene focused on the door and once focused on his artistry, then the frog sculpture reveal at the end would make more cohesive sense for the story. This event plays out after the two people have a casual conversation over a glass of wine, where they also mention his artistic background as well. The man puts the dinner he prepared in the oven and they then discuss watching a movie while they wait for it to cook. As they head to the living room, she asks if she could have a tour of his house, stating that she would like to see more of his artwork that he has displayed around in different rooms. When asking for the tour, she points out a specific painting on his wall and asks him about his artistic thought process. He then walks over to the painting, takes it off of the wall, and snaps it over his leg, saying that he

“never really cared for that one.” Of course, this was once again another plot idea that I determined could be portrayed as either humorous or creepy through the use of aesthetic changes.

Finally, the climax of the film comes when, after the brief house tour, the woman finally asks the man about the door. He initially deflects her question, stating that the door is only a coat closet with no importance, but when she presses him further about how he is being strange about it and then finally threatens to leave if he does not tell her what is behind it, he eventually gives in and agrees to show her. They descend into the basement behind the door, and the film concludes with the reveal of the weird frog sculptures.

To briefly reiterate and summarize the plot as a whole, a woman comes to a man's house that she met online for dinner for their first date. She notices a strangely important-looking door, which he immediately tries to distract her attention from by throwing his shoe at said door. They then have some small talk, where he discloses the fact that he is an artist, and then she asks for a tour of his home in order to see more of his art. He once again acts strange and snaps one of his paintings over his leg. He then gives her the tour she asked for, but soon afterward she confronts him about his behavior and finally asks about the door. After he finally gives in, he brings her down to the basement to reveal his collection of odd frog sculptures that he has created. Again, for the examination that is the purpose of my project, the most important aspects of the story to me when writing it was making sure there were plot events that could lend themselves to being bent to two different genres, while also having these events and the script make sense as a standalone story, regardless of the genre-bending experimentation.

PART II: Technical Parameters of Production and Delivery

Don't Croak was shot using a Blackmagic Pocket Cinema 4K camera. We decided to shoot in a 4K RAW format, with the goal being to have the highest possible resolution, while simultaneously giving me a large amount of room to alter the color correction/grading during the postproduction process. This of course meant that a substantially large amount of memory space was used during shooting and editing the footage since we were shooting in RAW. Each of the shots, which were normally around 30 seconds per take, were usually around 3-5GB of space, which I ended up almost completely filling two 1TB hard drives that I own. As for the delivery of the project, the final edits of the two versions of the film were exported using the H.264 codec with a 4K resolution size of 3840 x 2160. Each version of the film was compressed to about 4.5 gigabytes in its final exported form.

PART III: Successes and Failures

As I have mentioned numerous, the entire purpose of this project was for it to be an examination of how strictly aesthetics could bend and change the genre of scenes in a film, while the script and events of the story remained exactly the same through both versions. Even if these aesthetic changes failed to effectively and successfully bend the genre in intended ways during certain instances, the final product would still hopefully be a beneficial insight into these concepts for any filmmaker. Again, having a comprehensive grasp of the overall concept of genre as well as the aesthetics that play into that concept will always be an important tool for filmmakers, regardless of if they are intending to make a hybrid genre or genre-bending film. This project simply focuses specifically on the genre-altering effects that aesthetics, and aesthetics alone, can have on genres, without altering other base storytelling elements such as characters and setting.

One high point that helped my exploration of my concept was that we were able to keep the shots and framing incredibly consistent across the two versions and lighting setups. While said shots were obviously not completely accurate replicas of each other, our methodology when shooting was effective in making them as similar as we possibly could. As I have stated, the composition of the shots was not an aspect I wanted to alter to explore my idea. There could, of course, be a completely separate examination on that aspect, which in turn could also provide great insight and knowledge as well. However, by keeping the shots nearly identical between the two genres, it, in turn, allowed me to fully explore the ideology of my project by altering only the aesthetics, which other than lighting setups during shooting, were color, sound, and editing. Had we failed to keep the two different versions of those certain shots consistent, then it certainly would have taken away from my exploration of aesthetic effects on genres.

The performances of the actors were also consistent through both cuts of the film. While I told the cast that this was the goal from the beginning, since just like shot composition, their performances were not something I wanted to alter, the credit largely goes to the actors for the ability to achieve this. I quickly realized that if the actors had not done a good job of doing this, it would once again have been detrimental to the exploration of aesthetics I was aiming for and thus the successful exploration that was the intention of my project. Of course, had the actors given poor performances in general, the film would have been less successful in general as well, but that is obviously the case for any film that is ever created. All that being said, the outcome of this film also lends itself to emphasize the importance of an actor's performance and the effect it can have on the genre of a film as well. Since I directed the cast to give as neutral of a performance as they could across both genres, they were unable to really lean into the actions and emotions that could be present in those scenes were they not given this direction.

It quickly becomes apparent that performances also affect genre, similarly as aesthetics do. For example, a film could be in the horror genre, and in the plot, a monster stalks someone in a dark hallway. Even if the film looks, feels, and sounds like a horror film, even including dark and graphic subject matter and plot points such as a monster attack, if the actor does not give a performance that makes them seem terrified themselves, then the genre will be less effective in its execution. For my film, I think this point was illustrated best in the comedy cut. Keeping the acting neutral showcased that some of the moments that were meant to be comedic did not land as well because the actors were not allowed to give the performance more comedic energy and timing. So, while performances were not what was being initially examined or altered for this project, by not altering them, they actually ended up providing good insight into their importance and relevance to genres. I would not label this as a failure of the project, but again as a useful insight into filmmaking that came about from how the project was executed.

I intended on trying to make the aesthetic changes not overly drastic or obvious between the base drama scenes and the scenes having their genre bent. My thought process for that idea was that if the aesthetics were too in-your-face when the genre was being bent in the three specific scenes, it would possibly end up being too jarring for the film(s) as a whole and could, frankly, be corny and overwhelming. However, after completing the edits and watching both versions back, I realized that the different aesthetic changes might not have been as obvious as they could have been. Sure, the different uses of music are glaringly clear between both genres, but the rest of the aesthetics that I altered were not necessarily as potent in their differences across the two versions. If one watches the two cuts back-to-back (as they are meant to be viewed), then those aesthetic changes become more obvious, but again, they are perhaps not quite as noticeable as I could have made them. As for the scenes being altered, I would say they

ended up becoming what I would label as "quirky-drama" and "creepy-drama", as opposed to fulling becoming either comedy or horror respectively. This is something that one could explore even further past this project. Taking other elements such as this into account would be a fantastic way to take the study of my idea even further.

Regardless, this project was merely meant to explore the effect those aesthetic changes could have on the genre. By being able to keep the shots and performances consistent, whether or not those aspects helped or hurt the final films, I was able to truly alter only the aesthetics and nothing else, which again was the entire goal. Whether one thinks either version of the film is objectively successful or good as a whole on its own, I was definitively able to strictly alter only the aesthetics and explore the effect they had on the genre without changing the story, characters, plot, or setting in any way. While I could have made the genre-bends more distinct and dramatic in nature, I was able to purely examine the generic effects aesthetic can have.

CHAPTER V: Conclusion and Recommendations

This project allowed me to explore certain ideas and concepts through the medium of film and I feel that I gained a lot of positive experience and knowledge from and will be able to implement into my future work and endeavors. Throughout my initial idea and then the subsequent research of that idea, I was granted more knowledge about the concept of genre as a whole, as well as what goes into creating and shaping different genres. I was able to alter the aesthetics of three different scenes, which was an interesting opportunity and beneficial experience because it allowed me to play around with things in ways I never had before, especially in postproduction. It was quite interesting to finally see the two different versions next

two each other and be able to examine and think about the specific aesthetic changes that I made and how they affected the genre of a scene, positively or otherwise.

This project has also helped me become a better and more efficient filmmaker as a whole. The preproduction process, while strenuous, allowed me to get more producing and coordinating experience. I had never had to plan out and produce the entirety of a short film on my own like that, including doing things such as a shot list, call sheets, and other planning aspects, which will certainly be useful skills to continue to practice in the future, wherever my career ends up taking me in the future.

I was also able to gain useful experiencing in areas such as directing and editing during the course of this project as well. I had directed one other short film before this, but I was much less experienced at the time and this was certainly a much larger and more important project to helm. I felt myself learning to become more of a leader on set as well. When I directed the other film in the past, I had a hard time getting the performances out of the actors that I wanted. This was due largely in part to me being too timid to assert what I wanted and was looking for and in part to me frankly not fully knowing what I even wanted to begin with. For this film, I showed up to set fully prepared, knowing what I wanted and how to ask for what I wanted.

As for editing and postproduction, that has always been one of my favorite aspects of filmmaking. However, once again, this project was certainly one of the most daunting editing tasks I've ever had to accomplish, and I definitely gained some great experience from doing that as well. Not only that, but I also learned a few things about data management and the workflow of managing files between programs. I had never shot in RAW before, so that was initially a task at first seemed intimidating, but I was able to manage it just fine and it certainly was beneficial to my overall skill set. I also edited my overall film(s) in Adobe Premiere, then color corrected

those edits in Davinci Resolve, then brought the graded footage back into Premiere to finish my cuts. Again, this provided me with new experience doing things I had never done before and it was certainly liberating for me as an editor and educational in more ways than one.

As for recommendations, I do not really have too many. The biggest setback to the potential of production was something that neither I nor anyone else involved with the project could have had any control over, being that of the COVID pandemic. That factor certainly made it more difficult to do things such as plan, rent gear, and shoot. My main other recommendation to myself in the future or any other filmmaker would be to further push the aesthetic qualities in order to alter and bend the genre. It is my belief that a filmmaker could take the concept of this project and take it a step further as far as aesthetic changes could go. As I mentioned, my film(s) did not fully go into the bent genres, at least not as much as I originally intended. Even further, if one were to pick up my work where left off, I think one could do an exploration of genre effects based purely on an element such as actor performance, which is not an aspect that my project entailed. There are plenty of avenues that my overall concept could travel to, and it would be very interesting to see where they could go. One could start their genre-bending earlier in the filmmaking process, and change more elements other than just aesthetics. I believe that my project has shown that aesthetics are just one cog in the wheel of genre.

I truly feel as though I am a better filmmaker and storyteller after completing this project. I gained experience and knowledge in multiple areas of the filmmaking process, some of which I had done before and others that I never had. It was a lot of work to formulate the idea and overall concept, write the script, plan, produce, direct, shoot, edit, and complete my film, but I am eternally grateful for the fact that I did. It has been both an educational and extremely rewarding experience. I am grateful for the opportunity and resources that I had access to through Ball State

and the overwhelming benefits, skills, and knowledge that this project has granted me, as well as the insight that it can provide to other filmmakers.

This project was truly an examination of the impact that aesthetics can have on a film's genre. The use of different aesthetic choices in a film, during all stages of production, can have an impact on the genre of a film or on certain scenes in a film. My project showcases that to a degree in the two different versions that I created. I aimed to create two versions of a film, that have the same exact script, same exact plot points, and (nearly) identical shots between the two cuts. I then went on to change only the aesthetics of those two versions of the same story to alter the genre, at least to the best of my ability. Further see Appendices A and B to really examine this for yourself, just purely based off the look of the shots. In fact, when looking at these stills from the film(s), the aesthetic changes are actually quite obvious. But, during the viewing of the films, I found that they were not as apparent as they are when literally looked at adjacently. One could again argue that I could have made even more noticeable aesthetic alterations to explore my idea to make the actual cuts more substantially different. However, in the end, this project was about simply examining those effects. In this case, the journey was more important than the end in its finality. By exploring my idea through the production of a short film, I was able to learn a lot about how aesthetics can impact the genre of something. While my film(s) did not bend genres that drastically, the process of all stages of production are able to provide valuable insight into the generic impact of aesthetics. One could also pick up where I left off, and further explore this idea in a variety of ways.

That being said, in hindsight of my project and my final cuts, I have also displayed that aesthetics are not the only aspect of filmmaking that makes genre. Essential elements such as story, plot, characters, and setting, are still crucial to the backbone of categorizing things into

genre. However, my project also showcases that other things, such as an actor's performance and delivery can play major roles in determining genre as well. So, while aesthetics are vastly important to helping form and determine the genre of the work, they are not the sole decider. I have learned that by only focusing on those certain aesthetics that I chose to alter, I was limiting my ability to alter genre. In the stages of the project, I could have started altering things further back in the production process. By this, I mean that I could have chosen to implement writing, acting performance, camerawork, etc. earlier in production to create a larger and more dramatic bend to the genres. My project shows that aesthetics can take scenes that are written and shot the same way and alter their genre to a degree, but it also proves that there is so much more to filmmaking and genre studies than just how a film looks or sounds. As always, storytelling should be the absolute paramount aspect when a filmmaker goes to create a movie. Having a grasp on and effectively including all of these aforementioned elements is what makes a film great. And, for this project, I have examined the importance and possible effects that just one of those aspects have on a film's genre. The door is still open to play with my idea and concept even further, where a filmmaker could start altering the genre several steps further back in the filmmaking process. Since I aimed for my changes to be subtle, the genre-bending between the two versions of the films was not extremely potent. By acknowledging this, it once again provides myself and hopefully other filmmakers and storytellers with valuable insight into the concept of a film's genre and how they can play with it and bend it to their desires. While the concept genre might still be somewhat inexact permeable in its nature, this project, through all stages of its conception, examined and explored the concept of genre-bending through only one elemental change. Whether an audience approves or dislikes the final versions of my film, I think

the exploratory journey of looking at all of these elements related to my overall idea is a valuable asset for storytellers and filmmakers alike.

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APPENDIX A

Examples of Different Genre Looks for the Same Shot(s)



APPENDIX B

Examples of Different Genre Looks (cont.)



APPENDIX C

Script for *Don't Croak*

Don't Croak

by

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Winter 2020

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FADE IN:

EXT. GREG'S HOUSE - EVENING

A MODEST SEDAN slowly pulls up and parks in front of a small, quaint house. Snow lightly covers the surface of everything and falls gently from the dark, evening sky. A simple picture of a suburban winter.

JENN, mid-20s and smartly dressed sits in the drivers seat, nervously clutching the steering wheel. She glances at the house for a moment, then down at her phone, then forward. She lets out a sigh and the fog from her warm breath fills the air around her.

JENN
(under her breath)
Here we go.

She exits the car and walks up the path leading to the front door, taking in her surroundings as she does. The house looks nice, but seems to have far fewer festive decorations than the adjacent houses. Jenn stops on the steps, collects herself, and KNOCKS on the door.

A short moment passes, then the door opens to reveal GREG, mid-20s, dressed in a button down shirt, slacks, and waspy glasses. He's a handsome guy, one that would look even better if he had a better sense of style. He smiles as he sees her.

GREG
Ah, hello. You must be Jenn. Glad to see you made it okay.

JENN
Hello there. Yeah, trip was fine, thanks. Nice to finally meet you.

GREG
You as well. Now, where are my manners? Please, do come in. It's much warmer in here.

INT. GREG'S FOYER - CONTINUOUS

They enter the foyer of the house. Greg offers to take her coat by motioning to it. She gingerly takes it off and hands it to him, which he puts into a closet.

GREG
You know, this is the first time I've

ever met someone like this. Through the internet, I mean.

JENN

Same here. First date in a long while of any capacity, actually.

Greg smiles softly.

GREG

Can I interest you in some wine?

JENN

Yes, please.

INT. GREG'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

FIRST GENRE BEND

Greg leads Jenn down a hallway. Not many decorations to be seen. Greg doesn't seem to be a very festive person. Jenn looks around at the walls, which have some scarce paintings on them with innocent curiosity.

JENN

I love paintings with nautical themes.
Oh, that one's nice!

She points at a painting of a seahorse on the wall. She continues to scan her surroundings until she notices a

PROMINENT DOOR

with locks and bolts covering the outside. Intimidating, cold, and daunting. There is a presence about it.

Jenn looks at it inquisitively, clearly interested.

Suddenly, Greg throws his shoe at the door, making a loud THUMP. It startles Jenn and she stops in her tracks.

GREG

Sorry, I thought I saw a fly. I've been trying to kill that fucker for days.

Greg clumsily picks up his shoe and slides it back on his foot. He awkwardly smiles. That was weird. Jenn's brow furrows slightly.

END OF FIRST GENRE BEND

GREG (CONT'D)
Anyways, this way!

They continue to walk towards the kitchen.

INT. GREG'S KITCHEN - LATER

Jenn sits on a stool at the kitchen countertop and Greg stands in the kitchen facing her, leaning against the same countertop. A half-empty bottle of wine sits in-between them as well as a nibbled-upon cheese plate.

Greg casually sips from his glass, as does Jenn. They both have soft smiles covering their faces.

JENN
So, yeah, I'm never going back to that bar again after that. I might not go a bar ever again, to be honest. I remember you told me a while ago while we were chatting online that you liked going to the one of 16th St?

Greg smiles softly.

GREG
Yeah, I used to go there more a few years ago. I'm not much for the bar scene either. Not many other good ones around here, believe me I've lived here long enough to know. Too many people as well, especially drunk ones, as you've just attested to. These days prefer nice casual evenings, such as we are having now.

Jenn smiles back.

JENN
Me too.

She notices an INTERESTING PAINTING on the wall. It's a portrait of a frog, standing atop a lily pad and staring at a fly. The frog looks like it's grinning. It has a beauty to it, even though it's a little weird.

JENN (CONT'D)
You said you were an artist?
(motioning to painting)
Well, I guess that's a dumb question.

GREG

Yeah, but I mostly do graphic design now. I used to have a passion for more hands-on stuff, physical art and all that. I mostly do freelance graphic work for different companies now, all digital. Sometimes I get to step away and work on more, how you say, personal art projects, but not as often as I'd like. What about you? You said you were in finance?

JENN

Accounting. I'm still looking for a job around here, though. Getting settled after my move. I used to work at this cushy accounting firm in Atlanta with Mike...

Jenn catches herself from continuing her thought. She tenses up slightly and seems uncomfortable.

JENN (CONT'D)

I-I'm sorry. I didn't mean to bring up--

GREG

It's okay.

Jenn nervously twirls a strand of her hair through her fingers.

JENN

(softly)

Okay. Again, I'm sorry that I--

Greg leans forward slightly and places his hands softly on one of Jenn's. She recoils slightly at first, but quickly warms up.

GREG

Please, it's fine. I understand completely. No need to discuss it any further. Let's just enjoy our evening.

Greg leans back and takes another sip from his wine glass. He takes a large casserole dish, with what looks to be an attempt on lasagna, and slides it into the oven located behind him in the kitchen.

GREG (CONT'D)

Now, that'll take about an hour to
cook. What shall we do while we wait?
(motioning to living room)
Board game? Movie?

Jenn smiles again.

JENN

A movie would be fine.

GREG

Great! I have a pretty sweet
collection of DVDs. Some oldies, some
new ones. My TV runs 4K, too!

They both stand up and start to venture towards the living
room.

She also notices another PAINTING on the wall. It's a scene
of a lily pad, but the water surrounding it is blood red.
It's beautifully morbid.

JENN

Could I maybe have a quick tour of
your place? I would love to see more
of your art.

She points to the painting of the lily pad.

JENN (CONT'D)

That one is...interesting. What goes
through your head when you create
something like that?

GREG

Um...

SECOND GENRE BEND:

Greg takes the painting off the wall and SNAPS it over his
leg. He throws it in the garbage with a CLANG.

GREG

I don't like that one too much.

Jenn awkwardly smiles.

JENN

Um, okay...so how bout that tour?

GREG

Of course.

Greg smiles back. She looks up and once again makes eye contact with the prominent door.

Greg tenses up slightly again, noticing Jenn looking at the door. He swivels to face her.

GREG (CONT'D)

Right this way.

Greg leads Jenn down a separate hallway in a room, showing various art pieces.

GREG (CONT'D)

So I made this one using oil paint...

END OF SECOND GENRE BEND

INT. GREG'S FOYER - LATER

Both Greg and Jenn round a hallway and end up back in the foyer. They start to make their way back towards the kitchen.

JENN

You're so talented! I loved that piece in your bathroom.

GREG

Thanks. That's one of my favorites too. Took me a while to make.

As they approach the kitchen, Jenn once again locks eyes with the prominent door. She looks conflicted, like she wants to ask about it again but is scared to. Finally, she blurts out a question.

JENN

I have to ask, what's behind the door? It looks important. Some kind of art studio?

Greg halts and tenses up further.

GREG

Nothing. Just a coat closet. I think the lasagna's almost done.

Greg tries to keep moving into the kitchen. Jenn frowns. Greg begins to visibly sweat.

JENN

Then why does it have locks?

GREG

Don't know. Was like that when I bought the place.

Jenn stops fully now, and looks afraid. She struggles to gather her strength to say something. Suddenly, she gathers herself for a moment of bravery.

JENN

WHAT'S BEHIND THE DAMN DOOR!?

Greg freezes. He stares forward blankly. He doesn't know what to say.

Jenn calms down slightly, but still remains intense. It seems that she realizes her outburst has made things awkward.

JENN (CONT'D)

Look, I'm sorry, you seem like a good guy and all and I have been having a good time, but you're acting all sketchy about this door, and I don't really know you and...it's just kinda weird for me. Okay?

GREG

I don't think you'll like what you find.

JENN

Well, either you show me or this date is over.

GREG

Alright, just remember that you asked for it.

Greg slowly walks over to the door. He pulls out a set of keys from his pocket and begins to unlock the door.

INT. BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

THIRD GENRE BEND:

The door opens slowly with a loud CREAK. Jenn and Greg stare at the top of the stairs, looking down into blackness.

GREG

Here we go.

Greg motions for Jenn to follow him. They slowly walk down the dingy wooden stairs, which SQUEAK with each step.

They reach the bottom of the stairs and Greg flips a light switch, which fills the basement with blinding fluorescent light.

A SCUPLTURE OF A FROG

sits in the middle of the otherwise empty basement. Its large glass eyes look lifeless and daunting and its large, grotesque and scaly body sit there in an intimidating fashion.

The basement is unfinished with concrete walls and cob webs aplenty. Art supplies surround the frog sculpture.

Jenn is visibly taken aback. She puts her hands over her mouth to stifle a gasp. Greg stands next to her silently, watching her.

JENN

What in the fuck...

She takes a timid step back. Greg turns to her. Jenn begins to weep softly.

GREG

Well. I--

Jenn sticks her hand out and covers Greg's mouth. She turns to him.

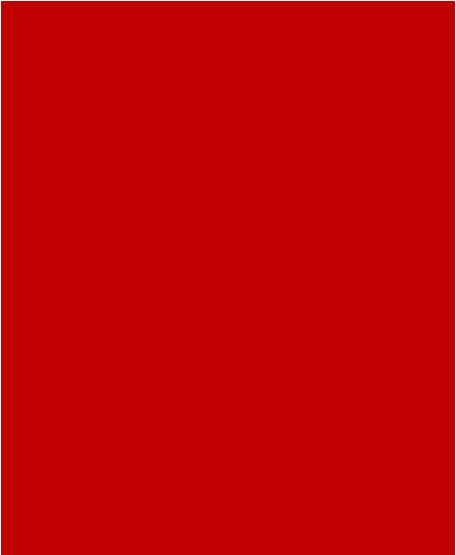
JENN

Do you do seahorses?

CUT TO BLACK.

APPENDIX D

DON'T CROAK					
SHOT LIST					
SCENE #	SHOT #	TYPE OF SHOT	DESCRIPTION	SHOT SETUP	SHOT TWICE FOR AESTHETICS
1	A	WS	Establishing shot(s) of house. Possible slow dolly-in. Get a couple angles. Label them 1A-1, 1A-2, etc.		
	B,C	CU	Inside car of Jenn approaching house. 2 angles, up to line "here we go"		
	D	MS	Jenn getting out of car, looking at house.		
	E	MWS	Tracking Jenn approaching door.		
	F	MWS	Other angle of Jenn approaching door, this time from the door.		
	G	MS	OTS of Jenn meeting Greg after he answers door.	1	
	H	MS	Opposite OTS of Greg meeting Jenn.	1	
	I	WS	View of Greg letting Jenn into house.		
2	A	MWS	Establishing/master shot of them in the foyer and taking coats.		
	B,C	MS	Back and forth of dialogue and taking coats. Probably OTS		
	D,E, etc.	CU	Taking jackets or just other angles of them talking. Optional.		
3	A	MWS	Tracking with dolly of following them down hall.		
	B,C	MS	Jenn dialogue, motioning to painting, also noticing door at the end of take and being intriuged.		
	D	CU	Shot of painting. Possible dolly-in		
	E	MS	Shot of door from Jenn's view.		
	F	MWS	Shot of door from Jenn's view, shoe is thrown at door from this view. Then quick pan to Greg for his dialogue and picking up shoe.		
	G	MWS	Other angle of shoe event.		
	H	MCU	Jenn's reaction to shoe event.		
	I	MWS	Them heading to kitchen.		
	J	MCU	Greg giving his dialogue about shoe event and/or going to kitchen. Optional.		
	A	WS	Establishing shot of them in kitchen.		
	B,C,D	CU	Shots of the wine and food.		
	E	MS	OTS of Jenn of conversation, until "me too". Pan to painting.	1	
	F	MS	OTS of Greg of conversation until "me too"	2	
	G	CU	Shot of painting, just in case pan doesn't work.		
	H	MS	OTS of Jenn of convo, until she brings up Mike	1	
	I	MS	OTS of Greg of convo, till she brings up Mike.	2	
	J	MWS	Third angle of their conversation.	3	
	K	MCU	Tighter OTS of Jenn until "enjoy our evening"	1	
	L	MCU	Tighter OTS of Greg until enjoy our evening	2	
	M	CU	Shot of them touching hands.		
	N	MWS	Wide from him leaning in to leaning back and taking sip of wine	4	



4	O	MS	Greg dialogue "that'll take an hour" while he puts in lasagna.
	P	MS	OTS of Jenn until they stand up to go to living room.
	Q	MS	OTS of Greg until they get up.
	R	MWS	Wide of them getting up to Jenn noticing painting, pan to painting.
	S	MS	Other angle of Jenn noticing painting and panning to painting.
	T	MS	Jenn asking for tour.
	U	MS	Greg's dialogue, "um"
	V	MWS	Greg's um line and entire action of snapping painting until Jenn's line
	W	MS	Other angle of Greg's action.
	X	WS	Wide of them, beginning with Greg's "of course", about to go on tour with door in shot. Jenn notices door.
	Y	MS	Other angle of them about to go on tour.
	Z	MS	Greg noticing Jenn notice door
	AA	MWS	Them going into other room for the tour.
5	A	WS	Shot of them returning to foyer/kitchen with two lines of dialogue.
	B	MWS	Other angle of them returning with dialogue.
	C	MS	Tracking Jenn, she notices door and asks about it. Go until "jenn stops"
	D	MS	Tracking Greg, her dialogue, him reacting, go until "jenn stops"
	E	MCU	Dolly-in on Jenn for "whats behind the damn door"
	F	CU	Greg freezing up
	G	MCU	OTS of Jenn "look im sorry" to end of dialogue.
	H	MCU	Opposite OTS of Greg from shot G.
	I	MWS	Other angle of conversation. Optional.
	J,K,L	CU	Shots of him getting keys and opening door.
	M	MWS	Shot from behind them of him opening door, we see down into the dark
6	N	MS	Possible different angle (side shot) of shot M.
	A	MS	Front shot of them, looking at them from inside the door.
	B	MS	180 degree flip of shot A. They start to go downstairs.
	C,D	CU	Their feet as the go down the stairs.
	E	MWS	Dolly-in tracking shot in basement as they come down. They flip lights on and Jenn reacts.
	F	CU	Jenn reacting.
	G	CU	Dolly-in on frog, possible pan around it 180 back to putting them in view
	H	WS	Angle of entire basement scene as Jenn processes what's happening.
	I	MS	OTS of greg as Jenn is turning and giving her final line.
	J	ECU	Frog at a different angle.

5
1
2
4
6
6
7



1
2
3
4



APPENDIX E

Executive Producer: Ben Strack Director/Producer: Matt Voss 1st Assistant Director: Ameliah Kolp	<h1>Don't Croak</h1> <h1>Day 1</h1>	DATE: 1/11/21 Sunrise: 8:03AM Sunset: 5:36PM HI: 34 LOW: 24 7% chance of rain
Location: 1405 N Wheeling Ave Muncie, IN	<h1>CREW CALL TIME</h1> <h1>11:00AM</h1> (Please see individual call times)	Lunch/Dinner: SNACKS & WATER WILL BE PROVIDED. WE WILL HAVE A DINNER BREAK DURING SHOOTING, AS WELL AS OTHER SMALL BREAKS.

Crew Call Location	Nearest Hospital to Set		
1405 N Wheeling Ave, Muncie IN	2401 W University Ave, Muncie, IN 47303		
Scenes		Cast	Location in Scenes
ROLL TIME			1:15PM
SCENE 2		01, 02	INT HOUSE
SCENE 1		01,02	EXT HOUSE
SCENE 5		01,02	INT HOUSE
SEE ATTACHED DOCUMENT FOR SPECIFICS.			

TALENT
VALERIE STOFFER - JENN (01) CALL TIME: 12:45PM
DEVION ROSS - GREG (02) CALL TIME: 12:45PM

DEPT	NAME	IN	DEPT	NAME	IN
PRODUCTION			SOUND		
Executive Producer	Ben Strack	O/C	Field Sound	Jordan Flora	11AM
Director/Producer	Matt Voss	11AM			
BTS Videographer	Alex Vise	TBD	CAMERA DEPARTMENT		
			Director of Photography	Brooke Wellington	11AM
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR			ELECTRIC DEPARTMENT		
1st Assistant Director	Amelia Kolp	11AM	Gaffer	Garrett Looker	11AM
GRIP DEPARTMENT			ART DEPARTMENT		
Key Grip	Drew Kissel	11AM	Props	Matt Voss	11AM

Executive Producer BEN STRACK BASTRACK@BSU.EDU	Director MATT VOSS 317.504.4133	DP BROOKE WELLINGTON 616.502.3333	Gaffer GARRETT LOOKER 574.601.9563	1st Assistant Director AMELIAH KOLP 317.531.1437
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General Notes

- *I will be providing snacks, water, and breaks between shooting. It is going to be a long shoot, but I promise to make sure everyone is taken care of and not overworked.
- *We are going to take every precaution for safety in regards to Covid. I will ask all crew members to wear masks during the shoot. The only exception of this on set is for actors doing takes or when you are eating or drinking. If you need to take a break from wearing the mask for some reason other than these, please step outside away from others to do so.
- *When we are setting up shots, only the crew necessary to set up that shot will be in close contact with each other. When doing takes, only the actors and necessary crew will be near them in any capacity. I will be using a monitor when possible while directing to be as far away as possible. I will only ask the actors to take off their masks when performing takes.
- *Lastly, everyone will have been tested within the week we begin shooting for Covid and will have had a negative test to participate in production on set.

LOCATION NOTES:

- *No parking in the parking lot directly adjacent to the house. The building is a business and is blue. Cars will be towed if people park there.**
- *Park behind the house or anywhere on Rex St.**
- *Again, masks on at all times except for eating/drinking.**
- *This is Garrett's house. He is graciously letting us shoot here, so please treat his home with respect and care. I know this won't be an issue, but have to say it anyways. Thanks everyone!**

Scenes	Cast	Location in Scene
ROLL TIME		1:15PM
2A: Master of foyer.	01,02	INT FOYER
2B: OTS of Jenn 's dialogue.	01,02	INT FOYER
2C: Ots of Greg's dialogue.	01,02	INT FOYER
2D,E,etc: Other angles of exchange.	01,02	INT FOYER
1B,C: Inside car shots of Jenn.	1	INT CAR
1A-1,2,3: Establishing(s) of house.	N/A	EXT HOUSE
1I: Wide of Greg letting Jenn in.	01,02	EXT HOUSE
1D: Jenn gets out of car.	1	EXT HOUSE
1E: Jenn approaches door.	1	EXT HOUSE
1F: Jenn approaches door, other angle.	1	EXT HOUSE
1G: OTS of Jenn	01,02	EXT HOUSE
1H: OTS of Greg	01,02	EXT HOUSE
5A: Master shot of them returning.	01,02	INT HOUSE
5B: Other angle of them reurning.	01,02	INT HOUSE
5C: Tracking Jenn, notices door, until "jenn stops" in script.	1	INT HOUSE
5D: Tracking Greg, her dialogue, him reacting, go until "jenn stops"	2	INT HOUSE
5E: Dolly-in on Jenn for "what's behind the door"	1	INT HOUSE
5F: Greg freezing up.	2	INT HOUSE
5G: OTS of Jenn "look im sorry" to end of dialogue.	01,02	INT HOUSE
5H: OTS of Greg from shot G.	01,02	INT HOUSE
5I: Other angle of conversation.	01,02	INT HOUSE
5J,K,L: Close ups of him getting keys and opening door.	2	INT HOUSE
5M: Shot from behind opening door.	01,02	INT HOUSE
5N: Different angle of shot M.	01,02	INT HOUSE

APPENDIX F

Executive Producer: Ben Strack Director/Producer: Matt Voss 1st Assistant Director: Ameliah Kolp	<h1>Don't Croak</h1> <h1>Day 2</h1>	DATE: 1/13/21 Sunrise: 8:03AM Sunset: 5:38PM HI: 45 LOW: 33 1% chance of rain
Location: 1405 N Wheeling Ave Muncie, IN	<h1>CREW CALL TIME</h1> <h1>1:00PM</h1> (Please see individual call times)	Lunch/Dinner: SNACKS & WATER WILL BE PROVIDED. WE WILL HAVE A DINNER BREAK DURING SHOOTING, AS WELL AS OTHER SMALL BREAKS AS NEEDED.

Crew Call Location	Nearest Hospital to Set	
1405 N Wheeling Ave, Muncie IN	2401 W University Ave, Muncie, IN 47303	
Scenes	Cast	Location in Scenes
ROLL TIME		3:15PM
SCENE 3	01, 02	INT HOUSE
SEE OFFICIAL SHOT LIST FOR SPECIFICS.		

TALENT
VALERIE STOFFER - JENN (01) CALL TIME: 2:45PM
DEVION ROSS - GREG (02) CALL TIME: 2:45PM

DEPT	NAME	IN	DEPT	NAME	IN
PRODUCTION			SOUND		
Executive Producer	Ben Strack	O/C	Field Sound	Jordan Flora	1PM
Director/Producer	Matt Voss	1PM			
BTS Videographer	Alex Vise	TBD	CAMERA DEPARTMENT		
			Director of Photography	Brooke Wellington	1PM
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR			ELECTRIC DEPARTMENT		
1st Assistant Director	Amelia Kolp	1PM	Gaffer	Garrett Looker	1PM
GRIP DEPARTMENT			ART DEPARTMENT		
Key Grip	Drew Kissel	1PM	Props	Matt Voss	1PM

Executive Producer BEN STRACK BASTRACK@BSU.EDU	Director MATT VOSS 317.504.4133	DP BROOKE WELLINGTON 616.502.3333	Gaffer GARRETT LOOKER 574.601.9563	1st Assistant Director AMELIAH KOLP 317.531.1437
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General Notes

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LOCATION NOTES:

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APPENDIX G

<p>Executive Producer: Ben Strack</p> <p>Director/Producer: Matt Voss</p> <p>1st Assistant Director: Ameliah Kolp</p>	<p>Don't Croak</p> <p>Day 3</p>	<p>DATE: 1/17/21</p> <p>Sunrise: 8:02AM</p> <p>Sunset: 5:42PM</p> <p>HI: 35</p> <p>LOW: 28</p> <p>56% chance of rain</p>
<p>Location: 1405 N Wheeling Ave Muncie, IN</p>	<p>CREW CALL TIME 10:30:00AM (Please see individual call times)</p>	<p>Lunch/Dinner: SNACKS & WATER WILL BE PROVIDED.</p> <p>WE WILL HAVE A DINNER BREAK DURING SHOOTING, AS WELL AS OTHER SMALL BREAKS AS NEEDED.</p>

Crew Call Location	Nearest Hospital to Set	
1405 N Wheeling Ave, Muncie IN	2401 W University Ave, Muncie, IN 47303	
Scenes	Cast	Location in Scenes
ROLL TIME		12:30PM
SCENE 6	01, 02	INT HOUSE
SCENE 4	01, 02	INT HOUSE
SEE OFFICIAL SHOT LIST FOR SPECIFICS.		

TALENT
VALERIE STOFFER - JENN (01) CALL TIME: 12:15PM
DEVION ROSS - GREG (02) CALL TIME: 12:15PM

DEPT	NAME	IN	DEPT	NAME	IN
PRODUCTION			SOUND		
Executive Producer	Ben Strack	O/C	Field Sound	Jordan Flora	10:30AM
Director/Producer	Matt Voss	10:30AM			
BTS Videographer	Alex Vise	TBD	CAMERA DEPARTMENT		
			Director of Photography	Brooke Wellington	10:30AM
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR			ELECTRIC DEPARTMENT		
1st Assistant Director	Amelia Kolp	10:30AM	Gaffer	Garrett Looker	10:30AM
GRIP DEPARTMENT			ART DEPARTMENT		
Key Grip	Drew Kissel	10:30AM	Props	Matt Voss	10:30AM

Executive Producer BEN STRACK BASTRACK@BSU.EDU	Director MATT VOSS 317.504.4133	DP BROOKE WELLINGTON 616.502.3333	Gaffer GARRETT LOOKER 574.601.9563	1st Assistant Director AMELIAH KOLP 317.531.1437
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APPEDIX H		List Equipment authorized for use:		
BM Pocket 4k SmallHD Mon CineSlider Extra Batteries Handheld Rig Zeiss EF 21/35/50/85	Extension Cords (3 3-way 25ft) 2 Fiilex Kits Fiilex Lenses 800w HMI Flag Kit 3 C-stands	Grip Kit 10 Sandbags, half small Boom Mic holder Boom Mic Kit 2 Wireless Mics	702 Sound Rec 3 XLR cables	